

then set it cautiously back on the floor.
"very good , sir,"
the young man says.
i smile, shake his hand, and
head out to the car, happy that
i guessed correctly that it was a
weight i could still handle,
doing my best not to gasp, and
hoping it looked as if i could have
kept pumping away indefinitely.

ANOTHER SOCIAL INADEQUACY

a lot of times i don't look
people in the eyes when i'm talking
to them. i can tell this
bothers many of them because
they will frequently try to
force me to engage their gazes.
they'll go so far as to move around
me, bend over, crowd in, do everything
to create an angle at which i cannot
escape their faces. they probably
think i'm afraid of them. or that
i'm staring off into space because
i can think up better lies that way.

actually, i have simply found that
i think better this way. i'm not
distracted by anything about the
person i'm talking to. i can
concentrate on what exactly i want to
say and how exactly i can best
phrase it. so i was happy to read
in a recent new yorker profile
that bill gates, who founded microsoft
at the age of nineteen and is, at
thirty-nine, the second richest
man in the united states, shares this
habit of looking away while
thoughtfully preparing his responses.
and while he reserves the right to
guard what he deems essentially
private, he has a reputation for candor.

i suspect that those who are fond
of mouthing utterances such as. "i
like a man who will look me square in
the eye," are really just looking
for an opportunity to interrogate
and to intimidate. they're not
interested in the subtleties of

truth but in eliciting the cliches
that they've pre-formulated for you:

"come on, locklin, admit it,
you're secretly jealous of eddie vedder,
aren't you?"

well, do me a favor, okay?
the next time you have to
deal with a used car salesman,
or an insurance salesman,
or a solicitor canvassing
your neighborhood,

notice that he will, invariably
(while crushing your hand in his
more manly one) stare you right
flat square in the eye.

AN INAPPROPRIATE ENTRY

the new delhi hot-air balloon festival
featured an enormous one shaped,
honest-to-god,
like the head of mahatma gandhi,

and the tragic incongruity is:
if there was ever a man
who was not full of hot air,

it was he.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

thoreau writes, "i was never
molested by any person but those
who represented the state ... i
never fastened my door night or
day, though i was to be absent
several days; not even when the
next fall i spent a fortnight in
the woods of maine."

i lock my doors these days,
except when i am sitting just
inside. in southern california and,
i imagine, most places in america,
we check the locks on our
doors and windows every bedtime.